

There are many other losses in the production of food prior to harvesting, part of which is avoidable. Plant diseases, insects, rodents, and careless cultivation all take a tremendous toll of planted crops. Disease alone in recent years reduced yields of important food crops as much as 15 percent for wheat, 13 percent for corn, 18 percent for potatoes, 12 percent for apples. Insects and rodents together cause damage estimated at close to 2 billion dollars annually.

Such estimates as are available indicate an over-all loss, including both avoidable and unavoidable waste, between the point of harvest on the farm and the point of sale by the retail market or its equivalent of as much as 30 percent for tomatoes, lettuce, cauliflower; 25 percent for cabbage, spinach, celery; 20 percent for fruits such as apples, pears, peaches; 13 percent for oranges and grapefruit. For less perishable commodities such as potatoes, peas, and beets the estimated shrinkage or over-all loss is from 5 to 10 percent. These estimates relate to average conditions and actual losses; they vary, of course, from year to year and area to area, depending upon the particular conditions and difficulties encountered.

OCT 2 1943
Adding together (1) the waste from farm to retail store, and (2) the waste in the home, but excluding losses on the farm prior to harvest, total food losses or over-all reduction in weight between amounts harvested and amounts actually consumed appear to be between 20 and 30 percent. The lower figure of 20 percent probably would represent a conservative estimate of over-all losses in this country, even in 1943.

What Kinds of Food Do We Waste?

Home wastage appears to be highest in perishables such as fruits and vegetables, and in baked goods. According to an analysis of 160 loads of garbage made by the Sanitary Engineering Research Laboratory of New York University, published in 1941, 23 percent of the garbage consisted of green vegetables, 27 percent of other vegetables, 29 percent of citrus and other fruits, 14 percent of baked goods, and 7 percent of meats, bones, and fish.

A survey made by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, of retail stores in Washington, D. C. in 1940, indicates that spoilage there results in wasting 13.77 percent of the avocados, 6.8 percent of the cauliflower, 7.6 percent of the cabbage, 7.9 percent of the grapefruit, 12.29 percent of the kale greens, 9.2 percent of the peppers, and 7.8 percent of the peaches.

What Does This Food Waste Mean?

- (1) In 1942, about 13 percent of our total food production was set aside for military and Lend-Lease requirements. This figure will be about 25 percent in 1943. The fact that our over-all food losses are approximately equivalent to our military requirements for 1943 indicates the importance of making every effort to reduce food waste.
- (2) The utmost increase in food production hoped for in 1943, as represented by the goals set for agriculture, is 5 percent. If we could save even a third of our food now wasted we would augment our food supply even more than this goal called for.

- (3) According to the American Bakers Association, we are now eating approximately 2 pounds of bread per week per person. If each home wastes but 1 slice of bread per week, the total would amount to 34 million slices, or approximately 2 million loaves each week. What would the hungry children of Athens or Chungking give for those two million loaves?
- (4) Nutritionists and medical authorities tell us that the American diet is weakest in green vegetables and fruits. How is it we allow so much of these valuable foods to go to waste on our farms and in our stores? How is it almost one-quarter of the food in our garbage dumps consists of green vegetables? (Perhaps we need to learn how to prepare and cook greens as well as we do meats and desserts.)
- (5) The little dabs of butter we leave on our plates in homes and restaurants add up to an enormous aggregate. The saving of only one-half ounce of butter per capita per week would have provided enough butter to have supplied our entire army last year.
- (6) How much needless food waste is caused by our rules of etiquette? Can we afford, in wartime, to refuse to let Johnny pick up the bone in his fingers and gnaw off the last shreds of meat? Is it really good etiquette not to tip your soup bowl to get the last two or three spoonfuls? With a shortage of fats, what's wrong with using bread to sop up the gravy on the plate? Can we afford to prepare and serve more food than the guests will eat just to keep up the reputation of the "bountiful hostess?"
- (7) "Spare the peel and save the spud." When you peel a potato you throw away one-tenth to one-fourth of its bulk, nearly all its iron, which is concentrated close to the skin, and let much of its vitamin C escape.
- (8) Squeeze your grapefruit dry! Just one cupful of grapefruit juice provides approximately a full day's requirement of vitamin C. When you fail to squeeze out the juice after eating the pulp, as much as a quarter of the value you paid for may be wasted.

What Can We Do About It?

This statement describes food waste of two kinds; preventable and nonpreventable. Obviously we cannot completely eliminate the \$189,000,000 of food damage done every year by rats, nor the \$1,600,000,000 of damage done annually by insects. We cannot prevent some blight and rot. We cannot eliminate all bruising and injury of perishable food products in shipment and storage. But much of this wastage can be eliminated by vigorous action. And most of the plate waste in homes and restaurants can be stopped. Food waste in home storage and preparation can be considerably reduced. Retail store loss of food caused by over-handling can be controlled. Food wastage due to prejudice and extravagant eating habits is subject to control. If we can save no more than a quarter or a third of the 20 to 30 percent of our food supply that is now lost between harvest and garbage pail, the result would be immediately apparent in larger food reserves. Avoidable food waste is, in fact, the largest and most economical extra food supply available to us. This is a war food job in which everyone can share.